

*Measures Against Crime*

the one that is the only balanced and reasonable approach to the problem of controlling misuse of firearms is a system of licensing persons who possess guns. This system places primary emphasis on the proposition that no person should be entitled to possess or use a firearm unless he can establish his fitness and responsibility to do so. In other words, ownership and use of firearms should not be a right, but a privilege.

The system of licensing will be a simple and flexible yet effective system, with necessary safeguards to ensure that no one will be unfairly deprived of the privilege to secure a licence for legitimate purposes. Here, Mr. Speaker, I refer particularly to the sports hunter, the target shooter and, indeed, the northern family for whom hunting is a way and a means of life. I am also satisfied that the system reflects the belief shared by the wildlife groups that there is an important need for responsibility in the ownership and use of guns. As we know, there are some one million hunters who readily accept the requirement of a hunting licence in order to use their guns, leaving, however, some two million gun owners unlicensed.

It is important to screen out those who are unfit to possess firearms. It is also important that those with firearms keep and use those weapons in a responsible manner. To ensure this, careless handling and storage of firearms will become subject to criminal sanctions. I will also be urging the provincial attorneys general to provide in their laws a stricter civil liability for firearms' misuse.

There are a number of other important measures contained in this bill which form part of the government's initiative to develop an effective means to curb the growth of gun-related violence in Canada. The government does not pretend for a moment that any or all of these measures together will eliminate the tragic and ruthless gun incidents that now occur. What we believe it will do, through the combination of sanctions, screening and reduced access, is reduce the occurrence of such incidents. With some 1,500 people, in the last year for which we have figures, having died of gunshot wounds of one sort or another, it is incumbent upon me, upon the government and indeed upon this parliament to deal with that situation.

● (1530)

Turning to another aspect of the bill, it hardly needs saying in this discussion that effective apprehension, prosecution and punishment of criminals of whatever kind relies very heavily upon the ability of the police to investigate and detect suspected criminal activities in a timely and efficient manner. This ability becomes critically important where the criminal activities are of a highly complex and sophisticated character. They take place in a well organized and geographically dispersed fashion and the known criminals of the syndicate are often but minor or bit players. The real bosses remain remote, and to all outward appearances respectable citizens.

Nor are the criminal activities of the organized operation gentle in nature. They involve, as we well know from the gangland slayings in Montreal and Vancouver, some of the most violent forms of crime. Even where non-violent, the crimes are of the most insidious nature: loan sharking, extortion, drug trafficking, and prostitution rings. One has

[Mr. Basford.]

but to read the reports of the Organized Crime Commission of Quebec and of the Co-ordinated Law Enforcement Unit of British Columbia to appreciate the scope and character of organized criminal endeavours and activity.

The government share the concern of the public that these criminal business enterprises must be combated and the crime bosses exposed and punished. Because they operate underground, shrouded in secrecy, the law enforcement agencies must be equipped to enable them to carry out their task if the public is to be adequately protected against the threats and incursions of organized criminals.

In this connection, Mr. Speaker, I now turn to the amendments proposed to be made to the protection of privacy legislation, amendments that have been the subject of considerable controversy in certain quarters since the introduction of this bill. These measures will come under close scrutiny before the standing committee and it is not my intention to discuss the details of the proposed amendments at this time. I do wish, however, to set forth my reasons for introducing these important modifications in the privacy legislation and, at the same time, attempt to dispel certain misapprehensions by explaining the true nature and intent of the proposed changes.

First let me say that the amendments we propose in Bill C-83 do not derogate from the fundamental principle recognized by parliament in 1974 in the Protection of Privacy Act: that the individual has a right to privacy in respect of his private and lawful communications with others. That was a fundamental provision of the earlier bill and remains a fundamental provision. Consistent with that principle, parliament prohibited absolutely any unauthorized interception of a private communication by anyone. It also established a rigorous procedure by which the police could, with judicial permission, conduct electronic surveillance for justifiable law enforcement purposes.

The real safeguards provided by parliament were the judicial scrutiny of police requests for authorizations, the criminal sanctions of five years imprisonment for unauthorized interceptions, and the civil recourses including those against the Crown. This was new legislation at that time, breaking new ground. It was stated by the government in 1974 that the effectiveness of the legislation would be closely monitored and, indeed, the legislation provided for such monitoring and reporting.

We have reports from the Solicitor General and from the provincial attorneys general, as well as a comprehensive report prepared in 1975 representing the views of the provincial attorneys general, major police forces and telephone companies as well as members of the federal Department of Justice and the Department of the Solicitor General. It is clearly evident from these reports that there are several provisions in the 1974 legislation that are seriously hampering the police and prosecutors in effective detection and prosecution of major criminal activities. I would be remiss in my obligations as Attorney General of Canada if I did not put these concerns before this House.

If we are truly determined to combat crime in an effective manner, our responsible law enforcement authorities must be provided with the proper means to accomplish that task. It was not, in my view, parliament's intention in 1974 to frustrate or impede the ability of the authorities to uncover and to prosecute crimes. Nor is it now the govern-